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India - Australia Circular Economy Hackathon

Why in News

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM- an initiative set up by NITI Aayog), in association with **Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation** (CSIRO), will organise a two-day hackathon on circular economy, '**India-Australia Circular Economy Hackathon (I-ACE)**', in December 2020.

The **idea of I-ACE was conceived during a virtual summit on 4th June, 2020**, between the Indian and Australian prime ministers, exploring innovative ways to boost the circular economy in India and Australia.

Key Points

- **Focus:** I-ACE will focus on **identification and development of innovative technology solutions** by students, startups and MSMEs of both nations.
- **Key Themes:**
 - Innovation in packaging, reducing packaging waste.
 - Innovation in food supply chains, avoiding waste.
 - Creating opportunities for plastic waste reduction.
 - Recycling critical energy metals and e-waste.
- **Selection of Winners:** Shortlisted students and startups/MSMEs will be called for the hackathon, where two winners (one student and one startup/MSME) per theme from each country will be announced at an award ceremony.
- **Cash Prize:** Winning teams from both the countries will get cash prizes. The winning Indian student and startup/MSME will be awarded a prize of Rs. 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, respectively, coupled with post-hackathon product development opportunities.

Circular Economy

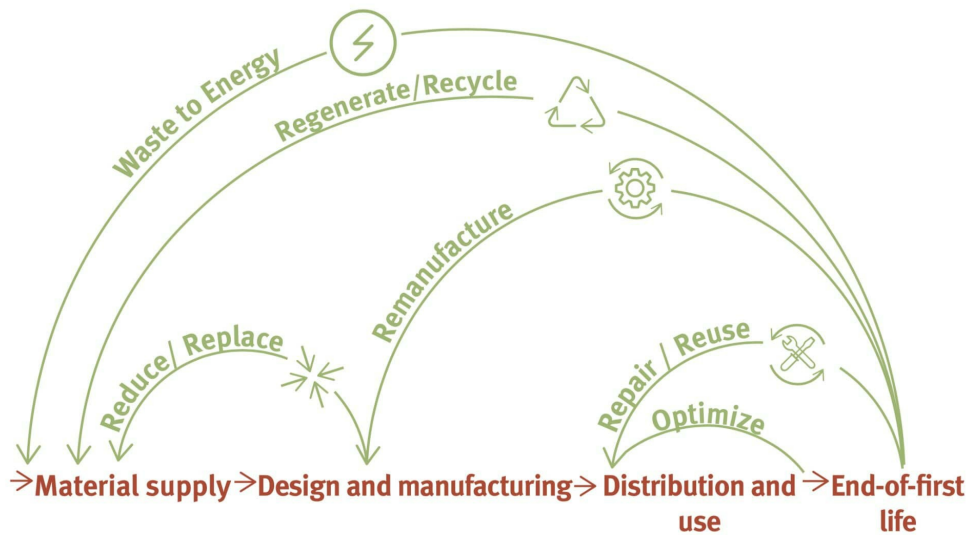
- **Meaning:** It is an economy where products are designed for durability, reuse and recyclability and thus almost everything gets reused, remanufactured, and recycled into a raw material or used as a source of energy.
- **Efficient Use of Resources:** It includes **3 R's (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle)**, Refurbishment, Recover, and Repairing of materials.
- **Example:** If a person is planning to discard his/her mobile, it can be given to someone else (i.e. giving the mobile second life-Reuse), rather than throwing it just like that.

Once the mobile reaches its end of life, it can be ensured that everything embedded in it, aluminum, copper, plastic etc. should be brought back to production cycle so that the circle of the economy gets completed.

- **Response to the Linear Process:** Many countries follow a linear process in which raw materials are taken from the environment, turned into new products which are then disposed of after use.

■ Linear supply chain

■ Circular economy practices



- **Benefits:**
 - **For Industry:**
 - **Fulfills the need for raw materials:** The output produced by industries in a circular economy comes back to the industries in the form of input, for example, when parts of a mobile will be segregated, copper and aluminum will become raw materials for some industries.
 - **Efficient utilization of resources:** This helps industries in earning cash profits equivalent to 3-5% of their turnover. Ultimately, QCDF (Quality, Cost, Delivery, and Flexibility) and sustainability level of industries get improved.
 - **For Environment:**
 - **Problem of disposal of waste gets solved** as in a circular economy, waste is converted into raw materials.
 - Also **solves the problem of air pollution, water pollution, and land pollution.**
 - **For Consumers:**
 - **Cost-Effective:** The products in the circular economy are more cost effective for consumers as they tend to be more efficient, besides having a longer shelf life.
 - **Efficient Products:** Increased Efficiency leads to a reduction in the cost of maintenance as well as that of disposal, which otherwise a consumer has to incur in a huge amount.
- **Global Response:** Germany and Japan have used it as a binding principle for reorganizing its economy, whereas China even has a law on it (Circular Economy Promotion Law).

Further, the **Sustainable Development Goals**, adopted by the United Nations Member States in 2015, include many related ambitions.

Circular Economy and India

- India is already on its path to the circular economy. Initiatives of the National Productivity Council (NPC) and government show that.
 - **NPC** is an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. **Productivity Week 2019 Theme** was ‘Circular Economy for Productivity and Sustainability’.
 - **‘Digital India’** Program contains a significant component of the recycling of electronic wastes. **Swachh Bharat Mission** is also about making wealth out of wastes.
- India has a **huge potential for reuse and recycling** as only around 20% of the total waste generated goes into the recycling process.

- Manufacturing Sector, especially MSMEs can help a lot in transformation towards a circular economy. The sector should 'DECIDE' i.e.
 - Designing processes for refurbishment and easy cycling.
 - Educating masses on Circular Economy and its benefits.
 - Collaborative Models for smooth implementation of Circular Economy.
 - Innovating Products for circularity.
 - Digitization for transparency, virtualization, dematerialization, and feedback driven intelligence for saving resources.
 - Energy-Efficient for environmental sustainability.

Way Forward

- India and Australia have had a strong and productive bilateral partnership since a decade and their collaborations across a broad range of areas have yielded significant results.
- Circular Economy can lead to the emergence of **more sustainable production and consumption patterns**, thus providing opportunities for developed and developing countries to achieve economic growth and inclusive and sustainable industrial development (ISID) in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- The transition towards a circular economy requires systematic innovations including new innovative financing models, partnerships, business models and close integration of **industry 4.0 principles**.

Source: PIB

In- House Procedure Against Judges of Higher Judiciary

Why in News

Recently, in a letter to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister has accused the Supreme Court judge, Justice N.V. Ramana and some judges of Andhra Pradesh (AP) High Court of **misconduct, corruption and political bias**.

The allegation against the judges is unprecedented since it has been made publicly.

Key Points

- **Issues Involved:**

- The Constitution of India **protects the independence of judges of the High Courts and the Supreme Court** by making them **removable only through a process of impeachment**. **Article 121 and 211** expressly bars the Parliament and State Legislatures from discussing the misconduct of judges.
 - **Article 121** states that **no discussions shall take place in Parliament** with respect to the conduct of any judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties **except upon a motion for the removal of the judge**.
 - **Article 211** says that **no discussion shall take place in the legislature of a state** with respect to the conduct of any judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court in the discharge of his duties.
- However, the AP CM has **not made the allegations against the judges in the legislative assembly**, and therefore, the **bar under Article 211 is not attracted**.
- The chief minister of a state can make such allegations by circumventing the bar under Article 211, as the constitution does not envisage such a possibility.
- However, generally **such allegations against judges are not made publicly**, since it **may cast aspersion on the credibility of the judiciary**.
- Since, AP CM has made the allegations publicly, such an act may invite action for **contempt of court**.

- **Action in Cases of Misconduct of Judges:**

- A **judge can be removed from office on grounds of ‘proved misbehaviour or incapacity’**.
- However, **not all forms of misbehaviour will warrant removal**. There could be other kinds of impropriety too.
- There are times when serious complaints of misconduct are made and CJI is called upon to examine them. Since 1997, judges have adopted an **‘in-house procedure’** for inquiring into such charges.

- **In-House Procedure:**
 - Under the in-house procedure, when a **complaint is received against a High Court judge**, the CJI should decide if the issue is frivolous or serious.
 - If a **deeper probe** is considered necessary, **both the complaint and the judge's response, along with the High Court's Chief Justice's comments, are recorded for further action.**
 - If deemed necessary, **CJI can also form a three-member committee** to hold an inquiry into the matter.
 - The committee should have **two Chief Justices from other High Courts and one High Court judge.**
 - The inquiry it holds is of the nature of a **fact-finding mission** and is **not a formal judicial inquiry** involving examination of witnesses. The judge concerned is entitled to appear before it.
- **Outcome of In-House Procedure:**
 - If the committee finds substance in the charges, it can give **two kinds of recommendations.** One, that the **misconduct is serious enough to require removal from office**, or that it is **not serious enough to warrant removal.**
 - If the misconduct involves removal of a judge, the judge concerned will be urged to resign or seek voluntary retirement.
 - If the judge is unwilling to quit, the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned would be asked to withdraw judicial work from him.
 - The President and the Prime Minister will be informed of the situation, clearing the way for Parliament to begin the process of removal.
 - If the misconduct does not warrant removal, the judge would be advised accordingly.
- **Procedure in Case of Chief Justice of High Court/ Judge of Supreme Court:**
 - If the case is against a **High Court's Chief Justice**, the **same procedure** is followed as that of a judge of the High Court, but the probe **committee comprises a Supreme Court judge and two Chief Justices.**
 - **If a Supreme Court judge faces such a charge**, the in-house **panel will comprise three Supreme Court judges.**
 - Also, the in-house procedure does not give any separate provision to deal with complaints against the **Chief Justice of India.**

Way Forward

- **Separation of powers** between legislative, executive and judiciary has been regarded as a basic feature of our constitution in ***Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala, 1973.***

- The constitution does not envisage supremacy of any of the three organs of the state. But the functioning of all the three organs is controlled by the constitution.
- Wherever interaction and deliberations among the three organs have been envisaged, a delicate balance and mutual respect are contemplated.

Source: TH

Live Streaming of Court Proceedings

Why in News

Recently, the Gujarat High Court has become the first Court to live stream judicial proceedings on YouTube channel.

Key Points

- The High Court allowed the open court proceedings through the video conferencing, except the proceedings to be conducted **in camera**.
In camera means in **private chambers of a judge**, with the press and public excluded.
- It observed that the initiative of live telecast is on an **experimental basis** and the aspect of continuing with or adapting the modality of live court proceedings **will be decided based on the outcome of this trial**.
- The move has been welcomed by lawyers, law students and the public at large besides litigants, being seen as a major measure towards transparency in judicial proceedings.

Background

- All the Courts have been functioning through video conferencing throughout the **Covid-19 lockdown** and even after that.
Advocates, the parties, victims, corpses etc. all are participating in the court proceedings during the course of the hearing through video conferencing.
- Also, in the **model video conferencing rules** as prescribed by the **e-Committee of the Supreme Court**, it has been provided that the public will be allowed to view the hearing conducted through video conferencing.
- The Supreme Court in ***Swapnil Tripathi v Supreme Court of India*** (2018) has ruled in favour of **opening up** the apex court through live-streaming.
 - It held that the live streaming proceedings **is part of the right to access justice under Article 21 of the Constitution**.
 - However, the judgment has remained unimplemented.

- The **e-Court Mission Mode Project** was conceptualized with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts.

Benefits

- A live stream **would help litigants follow the proceedings in their case** and also **assess their lawyers' performance**. People from far-flung States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala do not have to travel all the way to the national capital for a day's hearing.
- It would keep a **check on lawyers' conduct** inside the courtrooms. With the entire country watching them, there would be fewer interruptions, raised voices and adjournments from the lawyers.
- Live-streaming will **bring transparency and access to justice**.

Issues Involved

- The live streaming of the Courts are **susceptible to abuses**.
 - It can involve **national security concerns** and can amount to **a violation of the fundamental right to privacy** in matrimonial disputes and rape cases.
 - The unauthorised reproduction of the live streaming videos is another cause for concern as its regulation will be very difficult at the government's end.
 - Concerns have also been raised about the **commercial aspect of the whole issue**. The agreements with broadcasters should be on a non-commercial basis. No one should profit from the arrangement.
- **Infrastructure**, specially internet connectivity is also the biggest challenge in implementing the live proceedings of Courts.

Way Forward

- The public has a right to know about court proceedings in constitutional courts as well as trial and appellate courts. Openness and transparency reinforce the public's faith in the judicial system.
- Over the last few years, the Courts have taken steps to make justice more accessible. If the technology is available, it could be extended to members of the public, who can view court proceedings themselves.

Source: TH

Model Code of Conduct: EC

Why in News

Recently, the **Election Commission** (EC) has found former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister's **remark on a woman politician violative of the Model Code of Conduct** (MCC).

Key Points

- The MCC is a **set of guidelines issued by the EC to regulate political parties and candidates prior to elections.**
- It helps EC in keeping with the **mandate it has been given under Article 324** of the Constitution, which gives it the **power to supervise and conduct free and fair elections** to the Parliament and State Legislatures.
- The MCC is **operational from the date on which the election schedule is announced until the date of result announcement.**
- **Evolution:**
 - The origins of the MCC lie in the **Assembly elections of Kerala in 1960**, when the State administration **prepared a 'Code of Conduct' for political actors.**
 - Subsequently, in the **Lok Sabha elections in 1962**, the ECI **circulated the code** to all recognised political parties and State governments and it was **wholeheartedly followed.**
 - It was in **1991** after repeated flouting of the election norms and continued corruption, the **EC decided to enforce the MCC more strictly.**

- **MCC contains eight provisions dealing with:**
 - **General Conduct:** Criticism of political parties must be limited to their policies and programmes, past record and work. Activities such as using caste and communal feelings to secure votes, criticising candidates on the basis of unverified reports, bribing or intimidation of voters, etc. are prohibited.
 - **Meetings:** Parties must inform the local police authorities of the venue and time of any meeting in time to enable the police to make adequate security arrangements.
 - **Processions:** If two or more candidates plan processions along the same route, organisers must establish a contact in advance to ensure that the processions do not clash. Carrying and burning effigies representing members of other political parties is not allowed.
 - **Polling Day:** All authorised party workers at polling booths should be given suitable badges or identity cards. Identity slips supplied by them to voters shall be on plain (white) paper and shall not contain any symbol, name of the candidate or the name of the party.
 - **Polling Booths:** Only voters, and those with a valid pass from the EC are allowed to enter polling booths.
 - **Observers:** The EC will appoint observers to whom any candidates may report problems regarding the conduct of the election.
 - **Party in power:** The MCC incorporated certain restrictions in 1979, regulating the conduct of the party in power.
 - Ministers **must not combine official visits with election work** or use official machinery for the same.
 - The party **must avoid** advertising at the cost of the public exchequer or using official mass media for publicity on achievements to improve chances of victory in the elections.
 - Ministers and other authorities must not announce any financial grants, or promise any construction of roads, provision of drinking water, etc.
 - Other parties must be allowed to use public spaces and rest houses and these must not be monopolised by the party in power.
 - **Election manifestos: Added in 2013,** these guidelines prohibit parties from making promises that exert an undue influence on voters, and suggest that manifestos also indicate the means to achieve promises.

- **Legal Enforcement:**

- Though MCC **does not have any statutory backing**, it has come to acquire strength in the past decade because of its **strict enforcement by the EC**.
- Certain provisions of the MCC may be enforced through invoking corresponding provisions in other statutes such as the **Indian Penal Code 1860**, **Code of Criminal Procedure 1973**, and **Representation of the People Act 1951**.
- In **2013**, the **Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice**, recommended making the MCC legally binding and recommended that the MCC be made a part of the RPA 1951.
- However, the **EC argues against making it legally binding**.
According to it, elections must be completed within a relatively short time or close to 45 days and **judicial proceedings typically take longer, therefore it is not feasible to make it enforceable** by law.

Source: IE

Tsunami Early Warning System in India

Why in News

According to experts from the **Indian National Centre for Ocean Information System (INCOIS)**, India is much safer against tsunami threats than it was in 2004, due to the establishment of a state-of-the-art tsunami early warning system at INCOIS.

Key Points

- **Indian Tsunami Early Warning System:**

- The Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) was **established in 2007** and is based at & operated by INCOIS, Hyderabad.
- It is an **integrated effort** of different organizations including the Department of Space (DOS), Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Survey of India (SOI) and National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).
- ITEWS comprises a **real-time network of seismic stations**, tide gauges and a **24X7 operational tsunami warning centre** to detect tsunamigenic earthquakes, to monitor tsunamis and to provide timely advisories to vulnerable communities.
- Indian scientists can detect large undersea earthquakes in Indian Ocean in real-time and provide a tsunami warning in 10-20 minutes after the earthquake occurs.

In 2004, India didn't have any tsunami warning capability nor any public knowledge of tsunamis in the Indian Ocean.

- India is among the **first few centres to introduce quantitative tsunami forecasts.**

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of **UNESCO** (also known as UNESCO-IOC) accredited **Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)** as **Tsunami Service Provider (TSP)** for 28 **Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) countries**, along with Indonesia and Australia in 2011, for issuing regional warnings.

- **Recent Focus in Tsunami Warning Capability:**
 - The focus in recent times has been on **enhancing community awareness and response** through several **capacity building activities, biennial Indian Ocean wide tsunami drills** and **piloting of the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready initiative**.
 - **Tsunami Ready is a community performance-based programme** to promote tsunami preparedness through active collaboration of public, community leaders, and national and local emergency management agencies.
 - **The main objective of this programme is to improve coastal community's preparedness for tsunami emergencies**, to minimize the loss of life and property and to ensure a structural and systematic approach in building community preparedness through fulfilling the best-practice indicators.
 - **Two villages of Odisha-** Venkatraipur in Ganjam district and Noliasahi in Jagatsinghpur district **are now 'Tsunami Ready'**.
 - INCOIS is **establishing a network of 35 stations to estimate the tectonic plate's movements in real-time** and measure the vertical displacements under the sea directly.

INCOIS

- INCOIS was **established in 1999** as an **autonomous body** under the **Ministry of Earth Sciences**.
- **INCOIS** through Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC) is the **nodal agency to provide tsunami advisories to India**.
- It is coordinating with the Disaster Management Officials (DMOs) for implementation of **Tsunami Ready** programme in India.
- It conducts **IOWave Tsunami mock exercises biannually** to strengthen the readiness to handle the emergency situations with stakeholders.
- INCOIS also identifies the **Potential Fishing Zones (PFZ)** for the fishermen community.
- It has also **made improvement in overcoming the cloud cover** through usage of geostationary satellites and numerical modelling.
- INCOIS has also partnered with **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** and **Airports Authority of India (AAI)** to **develop a satellite based message broadcasting services** through the indigenous navigational satellite communication system '**NAVIC**'.

Tsunamis

- These are a series of waves usually **generated by movement of the sea floor**. These movements are **caused by different types of geophysical phenomena** such as **earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions**.
- The word tsunami is a **Japanese word**, represented by two characters: tsu, meaning, "harbor", and nami meaning, "wave".
- The tsunami waves behave very differently in deep water than in shallow water as their **speed is related to the water depth**.
- They **frequently occur in the Pacific**, where dense oceanic plates slide under the lighter continental plates. When these plates fracture they provide a vertical movement of the seafloor that allows a quick and efficient transfer of energy from the solid earth to the ocean.

Way Forward

- Initiatives like Tsunami Ready has to be replicated in other vulnerable coastal communities as it enhances ability to respond to cyclones and storm surges too.
- The best of warning systems could fail, if communities are not prepared, if they do not understand the official and natural warning signs of a tsunami, and if they do not take appropriate and timely response.

Source: TH

World Polio Day 2020

Why in News

Every year, **24th October** is observed as **World Polio Day** in order to call on countries to stay vigilant in their fight against the disease.

It was established to **commemorate the birth of Jonas Salk**, who developed an **Inactivated** (killed) **Polio Vaccine** (IPV).

Key Points

- In the last three decades, the **Global Polio Eradication Initiative** (GPEI), led by national governments and the **World Health Organisation** (WHO), has been monitoring the disease situation globally.
- As per the WHO, **since 1980**, the cases of wild poliovirus have **decreased by over 99.9%** as a result of vaccination efforts made around the world.

- **Polio Eradication:**

- For a country to be declared polio-free, the **wild transmission of all three kinds of Polioviruses** has to be stopped.
- For **eradication, cases** of both wild and vaccine-derived polio infection **have to be reduced to zero.**
 - **Eradication** of a disease refers to the **complete and permanent worldwide reduction to zero new cases** through deliberate efforts. If a disease has been eradicated, **no further control measures are required.**
 - However, **elimination** of a disease refers to reduction to zero or a very low defined target rate of new cases in a defined geographical area. It requires **continued measures to prevent re-establishment** of disease transmission.

- **Recent Outbreaks:**

- In **2019**, polio outbreaks were **recorded in the Philippines, Malaysia, Ghana, Myanmar, China, Cameroon, Indonesia and Iran**, which were mostly **vaccine-derived** in which a **rare strain of the virus genetically mutated** from the strain in the vaccine.

According to the WHO, if the oral vaccine-virus is excreted and allowed to circulate in an unimmunised or under-immunised population for at least 12 months, it can mutate to cause infections.

- **Afghanistan and Pakistan** are the two countries that are the **last stronghold of the wild poliovirus.**

- **Polio in India:**

India received polio-free certification by the WHO in 2014, after three years of zero cases.

- This achievement has been spurred by the successful **pulse polio campaign** in which all children were administered polio drops.
- The **last case** due to wild poliovirus in the country was **detected on 13th January 2011.**

Polio

- **About:**

- Polio is a **crippling and potentially deadly viral infectious disease** that affects the nervous system.
- There are **three individual and immunologically distinct wild poliovirus strains:**
 - Wild Poliovirus type 1 (WPV1)
 - Wild Poliovirus type 2 (WPV2)
 - Wild Poliovirus type 3 (WPV3)
- **Symptomatically**, all three strains are identical, in that they cause irreversible paralysis or even death.
- However, there are **genetic and virological differences**, which make these three strains separate viruses which must each be eradicated individually.
 - **WPV2 and WPV3 have been eradicated globally** but **WPV1 remains in circulation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.**
WPV2 was **eradicated in 1999.**
 - World Polio Day **2019** marked a milestone in polio eradication as the independent **Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication (GCC)** declared **WPV3 to be globally eradicated.**

- **Spread:**

- The virus is **transmitted by person-to-person** mainly **through the faecal-oral route** or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (for example, through contaminated water or food).
- It largely **affects children under 5 years of age.**
- The virus **multiplies in the intestine**, from where it can **invade the nervous system** and can **cause paralysis.**

- **Symptoms:**

- Most people with polio **do not feel sick.** Some people have only **minor symptoms**, such as fever, tiredness, nausea, headache, nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, stiffness in the neck and back, and pain in the arms and legs.
- In **rare cases**, polio infection causes **permanent loss of muscle function (paralysis).**
- Polio can be **fatal if the muscles used for breathing are paralysed** or if there is an infection of the brain.

- **Prevention and Cure:**

There is **no cure**, but it can be **prevented through immunisation.**

- **Vaccines:**

- **Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV):** It is given orally as a birth dose for institutional deliveries, then primary three doses at 6, 10 and 14 weeks and one booster dose at 16-24 months of age.
- **Injectable Polio Vaccine (IPV):** It is introduced as an **additional dose along with the 3rd dose of DPT** (Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus) under the **Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP)**.

Source: IE

Sudan and Israel to Normalise Relations

Why in News

Recently, in a **deal brokered by the USA, Sudan and Israel** have agreed to **normalise relations** to end decades of hostility.



Note: Israel has diplomatic relations with more than 160 countries.
Sources: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, WSJ and news reports

Key Points

- Sudan, which was **technically at war with Israel since its foundation in 1948**, has now become the **third country to forge diplomatic relations** with it, in recent times.

Earlier, the USA brokered diplomatic pacts between **Israel and the UAE and Bahrain as well**, to normalise their relations.

- **Implications:**

- The deal would **deepen Sudan's engagement with the West.**
- The deal follows USA's conditional agreement to **remove Sudan from its blacklist of countries accused of sponsoring terrorism.**
 - Sudan was **added to the list in 1993** after it was accused of harbouring groups such as **Hezbollah** and **Palestinian militant outfits** which the USA deems as terrorists.
 - As a result, Sudan was **cut off from the global economy** and was **starved of foreign investment** which faced another blow in **2011** when **South Sudan was formed** taking away its major oil resources.
 - With its name removed from the list, Sudan will no longer stay deprived of foreign investments.
 - Under the deal, **Sudan has agreed to pay USD 335 million in compensation** to victims of the **Al-Qaeda bombings** of USA embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.
- It delivers a **foreign policy achievement for Trump** just days before the USA election.
- It **boosts Israel's motive** which has made it a priority to **forge ties with formerly hostile countries in Africa and the Arab** world in the absence of any progress with the Palestinians.
 - In the initial phase, there will be **no exchange of ambassadors or a mutual establishment of embassies.**
 - After the **six-day war of 1967 war**, Arab powers met in **Khartoum** (Sudan's capital) to **pledge three "noes"** viz. **no peace** with Israel, **no recognition** of Israel, and **no negotiations** with Israel. Therefore, the deal holds a symbolic significance for Israel.
 - Unlike the UAE and Bahrain, which have never fought with Israel, **Sudan sent forces to fight in the war around Israel's creation in 1948** and during the **war of 1967**. In the **1970s**, **Israel backed Sudanese insurgents** fighting the Khartoum government.
 - With this agreement, **Israel will complete the creation of a safety cordon in the Red Sea**, which currently includes Egypt, Jordan, South Sudan and Saudi Arabia.
- The deal is also **aimed at unifying Arab countries against their common adversary, Iran.**

Though Sudan has been largely marginal to Middle Eastern politics in recent decades, the normalisation has significant symbolic value.

- **Global Reaction:**

- **Allies of the USA**, including Germany, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, have **welcomed the deal** as a boost to stability in West Asia.
- Meanwhile, **Palestinian leaders have strongly condemned** the deal, echoing their rejection of all of the Israel's normalisation accords.

Source: TH

PLACID Trials

Why in News

Recently, the **PLACID Trial, a multicentre randomized controlled trial**, has shown that the use of **convalescent plasma** (CP) as a therapeutic for **Covid-19** patients showed no positive effects and did not improve the outcome of the patients.

The randomised controlled trial (RCT) is a trial in which **subjects are randomly assigned to one of two groups**: one (the **experimental group**) receiving the intervention that is being tested, and the other (the **comparison group or control**) receiving an alternative (conventional) treatment.

Key Points

- **Convalescent Plasma Therapy:**

- Convalescent Plasma, extracted from the blood of patients recovering from an infection, is a **source of antibodies** against the infection.
- The **therapy** uses blood from people who have recovered from an illness to help others recover.
- Blood **donated by people who have recovered from Covid-19** has antibodies to the virus that causes it. The donated blood is **processed to remove blood cells, leaving behind liquid (plasma) and antibodies**. These can be given to people with Covid-19 to boost their ability to fight the virus.
- The plasma donor would **have to be a documented case of Covid-19 and healthy for 28 days since the last symptoms**.

- **PLACID Trial:**

- It was conducted by the **Indian Council of Medical Research** (ICMR) and its aim was to **investigate CPT's effectiveness for the treatment of Covid-19**.
- It is the **first and largest randomised control trial** to be completed in the world.

- **Findings:**
 - The trial results indicate that there was **no difference in the 28-day mortality** (estimates of deaths in the 28 days after entering the hospital for a specific condition) or **progression of Covid-19 from moderate to severe** in patients treated with CP along with basic standard care compared to basic standard care alone.
 - While the use of **CP seemed to improve the resolution of shortness of breath and fatigue** in patients with moderate Covid-19, this **did not translate into a reduction in 28-day mortality** or progression to severe disease.
- **Impact of the Findings:**
 - The ICMR is now considering **removing the option of CPT from the national guidelines.**
 - CPT as a treatment for Covid-19 in India has **led to questionable practices** such as calls for donors on social media, and the sale of convalescent plasma on the black market.
 - Although CP is a safe form of treatment when transfused in accordance with the regulations, it **involves resource-intensive processes** such as **plasmapheresis** (separating plasma from the blood cells), **plasma storage, and measurement of neutralising antibodies** and a limited number of institutes have the capacity to undertake these procedures in a quality-assured manner.
 - However, experts have held that **guidelines are not necessarily binding** and it is too **early to dismiss convalescent plasma therapy.**

Way Forward

- Covid-19 is a new virus and global evidence is still emerging on the best therapeutic options so it is too early to take a firm step.
 - For example, remdesivir has been sanctioned as a drug of choice by the USA drug regulator, while the **World Health Organization's Solidarity Trial** has found it had little or no effect on 28-day Covid mortality.
- Care for Covid-19 is individualised care and the use of the right drugs in the right patient does work. Some of the therapies can be continued on compassionate grounds and the results of one or two trials should not lead to the elimination of an entire treatment or therapy.

Source: IE

Extension of ESI Scheme: Arunachal Pradesh

Why in News

Recently, the central government has **extended the Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Scheme to Arunachal Pradesh**, with effect from 1st November, 2020.

The ESI Scheme **stands implemented in 568 districts** in all the States and Union Territories, except Lakshadweep.

Key Points

- **Integrated Social Security Scheme:** Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Scheme provides social protection to workers and their dependants, in the organised sector, in contingencies, such as, sickness, maternity and death or disablement due to an employment injury or occupational hazard.
- **Statutory Provisions:**
 - The **ESI Act, 1948** is applicable to factories and notified establishments in an implemented area employing 10 or more employees for wages.
 - The "**appropriate Government**" State or Central is empowered to extend the provisions of the ESI Act to various classes of establishments, industrial, commercial or agricultural or otherwise.
 - Most of the State Governments have extended the ESI Act to certain specific class of establishments, such as, shops, hotels, restaurants, cinemas, preview theatres, motors transport undertakings and newspaper establishments etc., employing 10 or more persons.
 - However, the threshold for Coverage of establishments is still **20 Employees in Maharashtra**.
- **Eligibility for Employees:** The existing wage limit for coverage under the Act is **Rs. 21,000 per month** (Rs. 25,000 per month in the case of **persons with disability**).
- **Self-Financing Scheme:** The ESI Scheme is **financed by contributions from employers and employees**.
 - In **June 2020**, the government had **reduced the rate of contribution** under the ESI Act **from 6.5% to 4%** (employers' contribution reduced from 4.75% to 3.25% and employees' contribution reduced from 1.75% to 0.75%).
 - **Employees, earning less than Rs. 137 a day** as daily wages, are **exempted** from payment of their share of contribution.

- **Benefits:** The **covered employees and their dependants** are eligible for a host of benefits including Cashless Medical Care Services, Sickness Benefit, Maternity Benefit, Employment Injury Benefit and Dependant Benefit in case of death due to employment injury, Unemployment Benefit etc.

The employees covered under ESI Scheme are also entitled to **unemployment allowance**. There are two unemployment allowance schemes namely **Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna (ABVKY)** and **Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojna (RGSKY)**.

- **Administration:** It is administered by **an apex corporate body called the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)**. The Corporation is **headed by the Union Minister of Labour**, as its Chairman.

Source: PIB

Kochi-Muziris Biennale

Why in News

In the wake of the **pandemic**, the **5th edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale** has been **postponed to 1st November 2021**, which was earlier set to be inaugurated on 12th December 2020.

Key Points

- The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is an **art exhibition and festival** that is the **largest of its kind in South Asia** and is organised by the **Kochi Biennale Foundation** at Kochi, Kerala.
 - The Foundation is a **non-profit charitable trust** engaged in **promoting art and culture and educational activities** in India.
 - It works throughout the year to **strengthen contemporary art infrastructure** and to **broaden public access to art** across India through a diverse range of programmes.
- In mythology, **Muziris was a port city**, among the earliest of its kind in the world and when **Kerala established itself as a major center for spice**, the ancient port of Muziris **emerged as its hub**.

Currently, the **Muziris Heritage Project** is one of the biggest conservation projects in India, where the state and the central governments have come together to conserve a rich culture that is as old as 3000 years or more.

- The biennale **exhibits artworks across a variety of mediums** including film, installation, painting, sculpture, new media and performance art and also offers seminars, screenings, music, workshops and educational activities for school children and students.

Source: IE
